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Dr. TENISON's
SERMON
Concerning the
WANDRING of the MIND, &c.
Preach'd before
THE QUEEN.

PUBLISHED,

By Her MAJESTIES Special Command.

A

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Concerning the

Wandring of the Mind

IN

God's Service.

Preached before the

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AT

WHITE-HALL,

FEBRUARY 15. 169⅝.

By *THO. TENISON*, D. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to THEIR MAJESTIES.

LONDON:
Printed for **Ric. Chiſwell**, at the *Roſe* and *Crown* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard. MDCXCI.

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Wandering of the Mind

IN

Gods Strife.

Preached by Mr.

GUTTEN

AT

WHITE-HALL,

FEBRUARY 15. 1697.

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A SERMON CONCERNING THE Wandring of the MIND IN GOD's SERVICE.

1 COR. vii. 35.

-----That you may attend upon the Lord without diſtraction.

THESE Words ſpake St. *Paul* in a time of Perſecution, and he ſpake them with ſpecial regard to it. During that ſeaſon he recommended to Chriſtians a ſingle Eſtate. He recommended it, but did not enjoyn it, nor

make a matter of diſcretion, a neceſſary Duty. He gave not (therefore) this Counſel to all, but to thoſe who *could receive it.* And upon this account it was that he then adviſ'd to that ſtate of life; He conſider'd that the Goſpel was to be Preach'd in many Countries, with great Pains, and amidſt equal Perils. And he well underſtood, that the leſs the Propagators of it were intangled in the Affairs of this Life, the more they would be at liberty to promote their holy Faith: The freer they would be from perplexity of Mind, and upon that account, the better diſpos'd to *Attend upon the* [Service of the] *Lord* [Jeſus] *without diſtraction.*

Upon occaſion of theſe Words I ſhall (by God's help)

1*ſt.* Enquire into the *Nature* of the Diſtraction, or *wandring* of the Mind. Next to that,

2*dly.* May

2*dly*. May be conſider'd the great *Evil* of it, eſpecially where it is indulg'd; and more eſpecially when it is affected in the Worſhip of God. That Conſideration will fitly introduce (in the 3*d Place*) *A Perſuaſive to Attention* and fixedneſs of Thought in God's Service; that the *Grace of God*, which is, in it ſelf, of ſo ineſtimable a Value, may not by us be *receiv'd in vain.*

I. The *General nature of the Wandring of the* mind, conſiſteth *neither* in its muſing upon many things, which increaſeth knowledg; *nor* in *ballancing* one thing againſt another, which helpeth us to make a right judgment of them; *nor* yet in its paſſing from one matter to another, tho the objects are at a great diſtance; for they may have a Connexion in reaſon, tho they have it not in time or place; ſo it is (for example) with thoſe great Objects, *Moſes* and *Chriſt*, *Canaan* and *Heaven.* But

But then the Mind may be ſaid to wander, when the Attention is removed from the matter which was properly before it, to ſomething foreign, even then when the Meditation on that matter was fitly and uſefully to be continued. So *Pilate* asked *what was Truth?* But he purſued not the Enquiry, neither ſtaid he for the Anſwer of our Saviour, who was the only Oracle that could have given him a Reſolution which would have left no doubt behind it.

This *diſtraction* of the Thought is ſometimes a *Natural Infirmity*, and *ſometimes* a wilful and affected Practice.

Sometimes the temper of the Brain is either over-hot and volatile, or cloudy, and heavy, and ſlow, in the Original frame of it; ſometimes Afflictions and Diſeaſes and throngs of Worldly Affairs ſhatter that Temper which was at firſt an apt

apt inſtrument of Sobriety and compoſure of Mind. And generally the Mind is apt, inſtead of maintaining an orderly connexion of the Images of it, which requireth Pains and Judgment, to rove from one to another, by a kind of caſual coherence. As, *for Example*, when there is mention made in Scripture of Chriſt and his Doctrine, as the true *Bread* which came down from Heaven; the Imagination of the Reader or Hearer who has not had his Senſes orderly exercis'd and fix'd, is very apt to wander from that *Evangelical Food*, to the thought of the *Manna* of the *Iſraelites*; and from the *Manna*, to the *Wilderneſs* in which it fell, and from thence to the *Rock* in the Deſart, which God *turned into a ſpringing Well*; and then peradventure he thinks of the Impatience of Thirſt, and the refreſhing of Water; and after that, the Fancy

is led into as many windings and turnings of muſing, as the *Jews* ſay there were in that *River which followed them.* Thus the Mind is carried to ſuch a diſtance from the *firſt thought*, as not to be able to tell, of a ſudden, where the Imagination began, and in what manner it was continued.

We ſee and hear a great deal of this in the *Digreſſions* which are continually made both in Books and in Converſation; and may, to our great grief, feel the Byas of it in our ſelves when we appear before God in his holy Houſe; where there is little need of our interrupting of one another by late coming, by Talk, or by irreverent Geſture, ſeeing our own Minds give themſelves too much diverſion.

The *natural Infirmity* which I have been ſpeaking of, is, in ſome Perſons carried on with ſuch *Indulgence*, that it becomes a *Pre-*

a *Preſumption.* Such way is given to it, ſuch content is taken in it, that it is properly a Man's own Act.

I ſhall not here diſcourſe of all the kinds of this wilful Wandring; but only of the removing of the Attention, in part or in whole, from the Worſhip of God, and the carrying of it to ſomething that is *vain*, or *wicked*, or *indifferent*; or if *good*, as *improper* at that time, as would have been the practice of the Impotent man at *Bethesday*, if he had deſired to have been carried afar off to a Phyſician, in that juncture when the Angel had been juſt moving the Waters, or when Chriſt himſelf was by the Porch.

This is the manner of thoſe who in God's Houſe are *preſent* in *body*, and *abſent* in *ſpirit*; who with cold Formality, repeat religious Words, not minding the important ſenſe of them; who *hear* as

if they *heard* not; who *read* with such Negligence, as not to *understand*, even where the matter is not beyond a Capacity which has not much depth; who see the *Holy Elements*, and think of *common Tables*, and wander with their *Appetite*, as well as their *Thought*: Who *draw nigh to God with their lips*, whilst *their hearts are far from him*; or possibly their Hearts are elsewhere so perfectly engaged, that they neither cause the *lip to move*, nor the *knee to bow*.

But,

2*dly*. The distemper of *wandring*, whether it be *natural* or *acquir'd*, is no small Evil, especially when we should draw nigh to God in Religious Assemblies.

1. Even there where it is *a natural infir-*

infirmity, it is attended with great inconvenience.

It hinders us in the ſearch of ſuch *Truths*, as depend upon any number of Conſequences. Where there is not Attention, ſuch Truths will not be found: It is from the ſame *Root*, that both *Credulity* and *Scepticiſm* ſpring. It is from want of cloſeneſs of Thought, that ſome believe any thing, and others nothing. Hence alſo is prevented *Reſolution of VVill*, ſo neceſſary in a good matter, and attain'd only by ſuch a judgment, as, being fixed it ſelf, fixeth the *Purpoſe*. And, for the utmoſt degree of Inconſiſtency of Thought, 'tis no other than Madneſs. From lower degrees of it, proceed great defects in a man's *Duty* to *God*, his Neighbour, or himſelf, whilſt the mind ſtarts from that which is before it, and leaves it unfiniſh'd

nish'd, reversing the Counsel of the wise-
Eccl. 9. 10. man, '*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to* '*do, do it with thy might.* So serviceable to all Business, Civil or Sacred, is the *application* of the mind.

It is true, that very devout Persons are subject to the *Infirmity of Wandring*; it being difficult, amidst such a variety of *Images* in the head, to keep one certain line of them straight and continued; and our great Adversary, in the midst of our best Thoughts, is busie in darting in such Suggestions, as by their suddenness, their incoherence, their contrariety, both to our present Thoughts and Affections, and Prayers; their Black and Diabolical nature, shew that they are *of their Father the Devil.*

And tho it is in *Divinity* as in the *Civil Law*, by which the Trees planted in another Man's Ground, are not, till they take

take root, judged the Property of the Owner of the Soil; tho evil Suggestions, till by our consent they are rooted in our hearts, are not our proper thoughts, but either the Devil's Temptations, or natural Infirmities, which the Merciful God, who considers our Frame, will not impute to such in whom *the spirit is willing, and the flesh weak*; yet it is an uhhappy and uncomfortable Circumstance which they ought to pray and strive against, and to the utmost of their Skill and Power abate, bearing with Patience the Weakness they cannot conquer, till God Almighty in his good time shall work the blessed Alteration in them.

But then,

2dly. When Men allow and indulge themselves in this roving of Imagination, and when they do so even in the Worship of God,

Then

Then 1*ſt*. *Their ſin is exceeding ſinful.* And,

2*dly*. *Their Condition is very dangerous.*

1. *Their ſin is exceeding ſinful*, both in it ſelf, and the Fountain whence it proceeds.

1. This Practice flows from a *corrupt heart*, which wants the *love of God.* For where the *Treaſure is, there will the heart be alſo.* If therefore the Heart valued God and Goodneſs, if it truly lov'd his Honour, and its own Salvation, it would not perpetually go aſtray from them, but be there *fixed where true joys are to be found.* The *Iſraelites* when they were out of *Egypt* with their Bodies in
Acts 7. 39. *their hearts they turned back again into Egypt*; its Idols pleaſing their imaginations, and its *fruits* their Appetites; *but the holy woman* in the Goſpel, who

who choſe the *good part*, whoſe Affection was chiefly placed upon the *One thing neceſſary*, ſhe ſate, in the poſture, and with the attention, *of a Diſciple at Jeſus feet, and heard his word.* Luke 10. 39, 42.

2. The *root* of this practice, *the want of the love of God*, being ſo evil, the *practice* cannot but partake of the irreligious nature of it.

Wilful Wandring in God's ſervice is a kind of *Contempt of God*, and a coming into his Preſence to ſlight him; to affront him to his face; and it gives him juſt occaſion to complain, as in *Jer.* 23. 11. *In my Houſe I have found wickedneſs.* It is a *preferring* of our own *ways* and *thoughts* before his: nay, 'tis the preferring of the *Injections* of the *Devil*, to whom we *give place*, by receiving of them into the room of *pious meditations.*

It is likewiſe a diſobedient *refuſal of his call*, when he ſays with importunity as well as Authority, *My ſon give me thine heart.*

Prov. 23. 26.

It diſappoints the *Ends* deſigned by God's wiſdom in his *Service*, *his own glory*, and the *edification of the Worſhippers*; for, by ſuch hypocriſie which withdraws the beſt part of Man's Service (that which is inward, judicious, hearty) and ſubſtitutes that which is ſcarce a ſhew of Devotion, God is rather *mock'd* than *honour'd*: and thoſe who are preſent in his Houſe with thoughts *ranging* in the world, can neither improve in *Knowledge* nor *Faith*, nor *Devotion*, nor *Morality*; ſeeing they attend not to the means and exerciſes of them: For our *Spiritual* is not like our *Natural* Stature, which grows up, whether we think or *think not* of it. Obſervable are the words of the Apoſtle.

Con-

Conſider what I ſay, and the Lord give you underſtanding in all things.

Add to this, the great aggravation of *ingratitude* in Sinners of this kind, who ſtand in ſuch need of the *eſpecial grace* of God, and whom God's extraordinary Goodneſs hath obliged with the means of it; for after all this they deſpiſe *his* and their *own* mercies, and uſe the Grace of God (as they ought to do the World) with an indifferency, and *as if they uſed it not.*

This undervaluing of the Riches of God's Love, inſtead of giving him thanks; this neglect of means, inſtead of embracing and uſing them for the improvement of our very imperfect nature; this ſpending of good hours to ſuch ill purpoſe, is not only *wicked*, but

2*ly. Exceeding perillous*, as indeed all wickedneſs is; for how pleaſant ſoever

vain Thoughts are, and how charming ſoever this Paradiſe in which the Fool wanders, may for a ſeaſon ſeem to him; yet the immediate conſequence is evil, and the end of theſe things are ſhame and death.

Diſtraction abateth the *zeal* of the Heart, as the ſcattering of the Rays does the heat of the Sun; and when Men are either cold or luke-warm in their *duty*, they are robb'd of the *Comfort* of it: they cannot take *delight* in that which they mind not.

The ſervice of God is a wearineſs to *thoſe* whoſe Thoughts and Affections are elſewhere entangled. So it was to the *Iſraelites*, who groan'd even under their Priviledge, and ſaid, 'When will 'the *Sabbath* be over that we *may ſet* 'forth wheat?

Amos 8. 5.

And

And for *Almighty God*, how can we imagine that *he* will mind those Services of ours, which *we* our selves do not; He cannot but observe them, but it is with the Animadversion of a Judge, and in order to punishment: and *it is a fearful thing*, (in such a manner, and in so ill a cause) *to fall into the hands of the living God*. He will make good his threatning in *Jer.* 6. 19. *I will bring upon this people* the *fruit of their thoughts*.

Now the Considerations of the *Wickedness*, and the *Peril* of wilful and affected wandring in the Service of God, do fitly prepare the way to the Third Part of this *Discourse*,

3. A *persuasive* to *Attention*, without which we cannot be either innocent, or safe, or useful.

Give, therefore, to God not a *mechanical* but a *reasonable* service. Let him have

more

more than the bodily Engine, and the natural ſpring of it, by which the Eyes, and Hands, and Lips, and Knees, are mov'd. Conſider that when all the Forces of Soul and Body are united, They are ſtill an imperfect Oblation; how much more when they are divided and weak'ned by the Thoughts and Affections running in many and in crooked Channels.

Offer, then, to him what is his due, and that which pleaſeth him beſt, and that which becomes a Man, the Soul, the intention, the inward reverence; give him it with *judgment*; not repeating (for example ſake) the *Miniſters proper parts*, ſuch as *Abſolution* and *Benediction*, as the manner of ſome is. Give him it in its place and in its ſeaſon; perform that ſincerely which you come to do: If any other thing be then thought of, tho' in its general nature, *indifferent*, nay *tho' good*,

good, it is *improper*, and takes us away from our particular duty at a time when we ſhould ſolemnly perform it. He (for inſtance) do's ill in God's Cauſe who reads the very *Scriptures* in the Time of the *Prayers*.

He that is in Honour and hath underſtanding of it; he that conſiders how excellent a Creature Man is as God made him, ſuch a one will not be eaſie in doing any thing *unſeaſonably* and *impertinently*; much leſs will he forgive himſelf for thinking with pleaſure on *God's Day* only on his own *ſix days Labours*, or (which are much worſe) his *Vanities* and *looſneſſes of Life*. *The wiſe man's Eyes are in his Head*, but *a fools Eyes are at the ends of the Earth*: Endeavour, therefore, to *attend* on the Lord; *not as fools but as wiſe*, ſaying in this ſenſe, *our hearts are fixed, O God, our hearts are fixed.* Now

Eccl. 2. 14.

Prov. 17. 24.

Now becauſe we are ſubject to the Infirmity of giddineſs and miſattention, and to an indulgence of infirm Nature; and, likewiſe to the Inſults of that Adverſary, who ſtudies to give the greateſt interruption to us when we are moſt religiouſly imploy'd; a meer *diſſuaſive* from wandring is not ſufficient for us, unleſs we alſo underſtand and uſe fit *Helps* againſt *Diſtraction of thought.*

And for *Helps*, ſome are but *pretended* ones, and will deceive us.

Others are *real*, and will, at leaſt prevent much of our Diſtemper, if they cannot wholly cure it.

Firſt, Amongſt the *pretended Helps* which will deceive us, I ſhall mention two.

1. The

The *First* is that of the *Romaniſts*, who preſcribe *the uſe of an Image*, as a proper Inſtrument for the fixing the Mind by the Aſſiſtance of Senſe. Whereas, by this means the Eye draws down the Mind from the Prototype to the Type, from the Creator to the Creature; and the Image is turn'd into an Idol, and the Immediate Phantaſm (which is made by the ſight of it) is that which is moſt thought of and ador'd. So that this ſecond Object diſtracts the Mind, inſtead of fixing it where it ſhould be truly plac'd; and gives it a diverſion by thoſe Bodily Appearances which do not at all appertain to the moſt high God whom we worſhip, and *whom only we ſhould ſerve.*

A ſecond pretended Help againſt wandring of Mind, is *unpremeditated Prayer.* For the *Novelty* of it will, they preſume, engage the Attention, whilſt that to which

Men are accuſtom'd will be formally repeated.

To which it may be ſaid, that ſuch as come in good earneſt to ſerve God, will attend much more to an ancient Service, which is judicious and grave, than to any new one which is raw and undigeſted.

That thoſe who officiate (being not inſpir'd) unleſs great Ability and long Uſe have given them an extraordinary Talent, are *diſtracted* betwixt *Invention* and *Elocution*; they are forc'd *not ſo much to mind what they ſay, as to ſtudy* what they *ſhall ſay:* and thoſe who *hear* are diſtracted alſo, betwixt *Aſſenting* and ſaying *Amen*, and conſidering, *in a new Matter*, whether they can ſay *Amen* to it or not.

Nor can it be imagin'd that the *Hearers* ſhould not *rove* if the Speakers *do.*

Wherefore, not truſting to *pretended*

Helps,

Helps, let us (*2dly*) make uſe of thoſe which are *real*. And they are many.

Our Infirmity of thought is help'd

By ſome *Order* in thinking, tho' it be not nice and Philoſophical, but ſuch as we may learn even from common Catechiſms, and Sums of *Chriſtian Religion*.

By freeing our ſelves, as much as may be, from *worldly Incumbrance*; and by baniſhing Care, which perplexeth the Mind, and choaketh the good thoughts of it.

By *preſerving the Temper* from being broken with Adverſity, through that evenneſs which proceedeth from Reſignation to God.

By keeeping the *Affairs of the other days of the VVeek* from intrenching too much upon thoſe of the *firſt*; ſo the *Jews* began their Sabbath about Midnight; and how (for Example's ſake) is it poſ-

ſible for thoſe to be undiſtracted in God's Service, who come into a Church on the *Lord's Day*, full of the Images of a *Theater* frequented on the *Eve* of it?

Further our *Infirmity is help'd*, by a *particular Application* to God againſt wandring in his Service, when we are juſt entring upon it.

By our *immediate* checking and recalling of *our Thoughts*, as ſoon as we perceive them to be ſtepping aſide; and by taking a holy Revenge upon our ſelves, eſpecially in private, in repeating that to which we leſs attended, till we are ſatisfied in our attention to it.

It is further aſſiſted, by the conſideration of the *Majeſty* of him we worſhip; by laying to Heart the *moment of the Service* it ſelf, and making it caſe of Life and Death eternal, which will almoſt force us to attend to it

By

By the *Time* consider'd, as separated from common Use and servile Labour.

By the *Place*, thought upon as *dreadful*, or as God's especial Presence.

By the *decency* of the *Place* fitted for a Religious Assembly, without *variety of superstitious Figures*, such especially as we see in many Romish Churches, where they serve for Pomp, rather than Edification, and for the refreshing of those to whom the unedifying sound of an unknown Language would else be very tedious.

Images, and such-like *Ornaments*, amuse the Fancy, and draw away the Attention from the Service of God, which is the Business for which such Buildings are erected, and where it sufficeth if they be convenient, clean and decent.

Furthermore, our Infirmity is help'd by *Scriptures* and Services in a *known Tongue*; for

for how ſhall a Man attend to that which he does not underſtand?

Alſo by the *good Method* and Order of that which is deliver'd; and by *liturgical* Words, well choſen, and ready prepar'd. For a Service, which is well weigh'd, and generally approv'd of, and at hand for uſe, leaves the Mind at more freedom for the exerciſe of its Devotion: It hath nothing then to do, but to add to *good VVords*; religious fervour of Mind, which by the intenſeneſs of it, will keep off Foreign Ideas; The Birds will not light upon the Sacrifice whilſt it is flaming.

Nor are thoſe frequent *breaks* in Liturgy inconſiderable Helps to the common People, who are loſt in a long-continued Service; whilſt they are able to attend to that which is ſhort, and after a ſmall pauſe, to renew their Attention to a following *Ejaculation* or *Collect*: and to them thoſe

ſhort

ſhort *Ejaculations*, which the ignorant revile as *ſhreds of Prayer*, are real *Helps of Devotion.*

Laſt of all; God, *by his Spirit*, helps the Spirit of Man in the uſe of good Means, when, with profound Humility, and fervent Devotion, he prays for it.

After all this, let no Man excuſe himſelf upon the *impoſſibility* of *perfect ſteadineſs of Mind.*

The firſt Motions to wandring can ſcarcely be, at all times, prevented; but the continuance of them is our own Act and Choice. In *Waters*, a ſmall Circle, made by any thing caſt in, is enlarg'd into a greater, and ſo multiplied, till at laſt the whole Surface becomes uneven; but it needs not be ſo in the *deep* of the Heart which is a *voluntary Agent.* That which cannot be help'd, ſhall not be anſwer'd for: but much may be help'd; and if it be not, ſuch diſtraction

ſtraction is beyond Apology. All vain, all wicked Thoughts which we delight in, are our own; and proceed not ſo much from the Frailty of Nature, as the Pollution of the Heart.

And happier, much happier is the Condition of the Ideot, who cannot think with any tolerable conſiſtence; or the *ſick Perſon*, whoſe Fever rageth, and not himſelf, than a Man who has a good Capacity, and is a Maſter of Method; yet, when he is upon the great Buſineſs of ſaving his Soul, takes up all his thoughts with his Farms and his Oxen, his Trade and Merchandize, his Politicks or ſecular Studies.

And for thoſe pious Worſhippers, whoſe minds are weak, and memories frail and by Age, or other Cauſes, paſt the recovery of the ſoundneſs of them, let them not be ſo diſcouraged as to forbear God's Worſhip, becauſe they do it with ſuch im-

imperfection. The Paralitic muſt move on, tho' they ſhake every ſtep, they make way, tho' ſlowly; and they will, at laſt, *finiſh their Courſe with joy.* That which the Apoſtle ſaith of *Charity*, is true of *Piety*; If *there be a willing mind it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not.*

It is confeſs'd, that one end of our coming together in Religious Aſſemblies, is the giving a *publick Sign* of our Communion with God's Church, which is done by *our preſence*, and our decent behaviour there. But there is ſomething more requir'd; the paying of our *actual Homage* to God, by the Dedication of Soul and Body to him, and the attending to the *holy Offices*, as means appointed by God for our inſtruction, reproof, encouragement, and comfort; and the conveying to us his eſpecial Grace and Bleſſing.

It is true, the *Liturgy* is a ſettled Form, and gives not daily new entertainment to Mens Fancies; but it is ſuch, as being often repeated, may yet pleaſe and benefit the *Devout.*

The Scriptures are always the ſame, but they are a great deep of *Divine Wiſdom*; and every time a Man attends to them, he may poſſibly find ſomething inſtructive and uſeful, which before he obſerv'd not.

It is certain that we cannot hear *Moſes* and the Prophets in Perſon: But God's good Providence hath convey'd their writings down to us, and we muſt read and hear them.

It is true, that *Solomon*, whoſe Wiſdom drew Hearers from the Ends of the Earth, do's not now *ſpeak himſelf*, but his *Works do.*

It is confeſs'd, that *Chriſt* who *ſpake as never man ſpake*, is in the Heavens, but his *written word* is in his Church, and a mighty

ty Power goes along with it whereſoever there is a teachable and attentive Diſpoſition.

It is alſo humbly acknowledg'd, that there are great Imperfections in the Miniſters of the Church; yet Chriſt hath been pleas'd, in *earthen Veſſels*, to convey to the World the rich *Treaſure* of his Goſpel.

Let us therefore receive the Gift without deſpiſing the meanneſs of the Meſſengers; and mind not ſo much who the Perſon is that ſpeaks, as that *which is ſaid*, and the Divine Authority, from whence he has Commiſſion to preach the Doctrine of the *Meſſiah*.

Finally, Let us make devout ſupplication to *Almighty God, who hath cauſed all Holy Scriptures to be written for our Learning*; praying him to grant, *That we may in ſuch wiſe read, hear, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that by patience and comfort of his Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold faſt the bleſſed Hope of everlaſting Life, which he hath given us in Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* Amen.

FINIS.

Dr. *HORNECK*'s

Sermon at the Consecration

OF THE

BISHOP of *SARUM.*

Imprimatur,

Z. Isham, R. P. P. Henrico,
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